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van Marrewijk, Alfons; Dessing, Nick

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Negotiating reciprocal relationships: Practices of engaged scholarship in project studies

Alfons van Marrewijk [a,*], Nick Dessing [b]

[a] Organization Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[b] Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

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Abstract

Engaged scholarship is frequently being advocated to bridge the knowledge gap between academic scholars and project practitioners. Through the methodology of engaged scholarship academics establish a reciprocal relationship with the project community while adhering to the standards of quality scholarship. Notwithstanding its growing popularity, in project studies we do not learn much about the practices involved in engaged scholarship, neither is the concept theoretically well developed. We argue that, to further the project studies debate, methodological reflection on the reciprocal relationship between academics and practitioners is needed. For this purpose, we provide an analytical framework containing four elements; goals, negotiation practices, reciprocity typology and outcomes of project studies. We then use this framework to analyze three engaged project studies. The paper contributes to project studies with an enhanced concept of engaged scholarship containing three types of reciprocity; generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity. Furthermore, we found that a reciprocal relationship is negotiated and changes over time. We identified four mechanisms that negatively impact the academic and practical outcomes of engaged scholarship studies.

Keywords: Engaged scholarship; Reciprocity; Methodology; Practices; Project studies; Knowledge gap

1. Introduction

Recent decade there has been a strong call for bridging the knowledge gap between (project) management studies and practitioners (Bartunek, 2007; Söderlund and Maylor, 2012; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Walker et al., 2008). Scholars acknowledge the need to bring together practitioners and academics in order to develop knowledge that is relevant for practice (Bartunek, 2007; Schön, 1983). Söderlund and Maylor (2012) for example, propose to improve the architectures of knowledge co-production together with industry participants, and to actively implement research outcomes into both practice and teaching. Walker et al. (2008) see practical value in applying sound theory and rigorous academic research methods to advance knowledge that has relevance and crucial impact on project management practice. Finally, McKelvey (2006) perceives research and practice as a chain activity in which knowledge moves back and forth. Although project management studies are traditionally close to practice (Morris, 2013), most (project) scholars agree that overcoming the knowledge gap and stimulating change in project practice remains challenging (e.g. Söderlund and Maylor, 2012; Winter et al., 2006).

To overcome the knowledge gap scholars frequently propose 'engaged scholarship' (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016; Söderlund and Maylor, 2012; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). It was Boyer (1990) who introduced the concept in response to, what he saw as, a decline of public confidence in university activities. He argued that universities had to reaffirm their historic task of public service and to

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: a.h.van.marrewijk@vu.nl (A. van Marrewijk).

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rethink scholarship, and in response offered a new paradigm of scholarship that aimed to combine the rigor of traditional scholarship with the values and relevance of engagement (Boyer, 1996). Ever since, the concept has received a steadily growing interest from a wide range of scholars (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Sandmann, 2008). As consequence, the use and interpretation of the concept is fragmented and may now refer to concepts as broad as civic engagement (Sandmann, 2008), engaged research (Small and Uttal, 2005), co-creation (Martin, 2010), participatory- or action research (Couto, 2000; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) and even community development (Sandmann, 2008). Because of this wide range of perspectives on engagement a common definition is difficult to establish (Morrison and Wagner, 2016). This led Sandmann (2008) to declare the field to be in a state of "definitional anarchy" (p.91), turning engaged scholarship into a theoretical 'black box'. Consequently, referring to the concept of engaged scholarship (e.g. Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016) does not tell us much about actual research practices, nor does it elicit reflection on these practices. This is a serious problem because it hurts the case that engaged scholars are making, that their research is as rigorous as traditional research (Barker, 2004).

Although there is no academic clarity on the concept (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Sandmann, 2008), engaged scholarship in academic literature is generally understood as the application of sound theory and rigorous academic research methods in a reciprocal relationship with practitioners (Van de Ven, 2007). Apart from these, Beaulieu et al. (2018) found, in a review of 20 years of engaged scholarship studies three more principles; identifying community needs, boundary-crossing and democratization of knowledge. Multiple scholars have aimed to simplify the definitional complexity through classification or taxonomy (e.g. Barker, 2004; Beaulieu et al., 2018; Franz, 2009; Sandmann, 2008). For example by classification of emerging practices of engaged scholarship (Barker, 2004) and practitioners' involvement (Martin, 2010). Although these classifications may provide some meaningful insight, they do not further our understanding of the concept (Morrison and Wagner, 2016). Therefore, the concept of engaged scholarship needs further theoretical development.

1.1. Shortcomings of engaged scholarship in project studies

Because of its promise for impact and relevance for both practitioner communities and the wider public (Boyer, 1996) engaged scholarship has been championed in a wide range of academic disciplines (Beaulieu et al., 2018), among which project management (e.g. Söderlund and Maylor, 2012). Within project management engaged scholarship is proposed to be very helpful for project management scholars to secure impact and to publish "good, solid, critical research" (Söderlund and Maylor, 2012: 691). However, we notice two shortcomings in the use of engaged scholarship in project studies. The first shortcoming is the obscuring and downplaying of the engagement of scholars in project studies literature. Frequently, scholars only superficially mention their engagement with practitioners; for example by writing that "the author had been observing the developments of the company since 1999 and was partly involved on different occasions" (Huemann, 2010: 363) or that research has been carried out at a community of practitioners where the researcher "was appointed the advisory role of cultural expert" (Van der Ende and Van Marrewijk, 2019), or even stating "that the authors were at no stage consultants to the project" (Pitsis et al., 2003: 588). We suspect that project scholars downplay their engaged roles because they might worry that other scholars perceive engaged scholarship not to be 'proper' academic work (Barge and Shockley-Zalabak, 2008) or to be "too applied, too close to practice for proper academic study" (Söderlund and Maylor, 2012: 687). These views suggest a negative relation between scholarship and engagement; the more a scholar is engaged in the field the less academic their research outcomes are assumed to be (Martin, 2010).

The second shortcoming is the lack of theoretical maturity of engaged scholarship. Despite Sandmann's (2008) call for further theoretical development of the concept, a literature review on engaged scholarship 10 years later (Beaulieu et al., 2018) still defines engaged scholarship as a 'new' concept. Based upon their scoping review Beaulieu, Breton and Brousselle (2018: 12) try to develop the concept by defining engaged scholarship as an academic attitude, rooted in values of social justice and citizenship, that motivates academics "to work in ways that will build mutually beneficial and reciprocal bridges between university activity and civil society". However, we argue here that academics still downplay the engagement of their research as a result of the immaturity of engaged scholarship as a concept, while the concept lacks maturity because of "a paucity of empirical studies and serious policy analysis" (Sandmann, 2008: 99). This leaves theory development on engaged scholarship at an impasse.

1.2. Developing theory and exploring practices of engaged scholarship in project studies

These shortcomings limit our understanding of the actual influence of researcher engagement on the nature and outcome of project studies and by doing so hampering further development of the project studies debate (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016; Winter et al., 2006). Therefore, we follow Geraldi and Söderlund (2016) in encouraging project scholars to reflect upon methodological issues and to become more aware of the nature of their research and knowledge co-creation process. We follow a problematization research strategy (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) which typically involve a small literature coverage with in-depth readings of the most important texts. The specific aim of such a strategy is to identify and challenge their underlying assumptions. To do so we draw on an interpretative perspective (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006) and argue that the conduct of engaged research is influenced by academic – practitioner relations. Project scholars and practitioners need to be reflexive of their roles in the development of scientific knowledge and avoid developing dysfunctional relationships. In this context, reflexivity is understood as casting a "critical eye on [the] theoretical

and methodological apparatus and related research capabilities in the field" (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016: 788).

The aim of this paper is to encourage methodological reflexivity of project scholars and practitioners engaged in building mutually beneficial and reciprocal bridges between university and project communities by further explore practices of and develop theory on the concept of engaged scholarship in the field of project studies. Practices are understood as dynamic and provisional, and as activities that require some form of participation (Blomquist et al., 2010). Following from the discussion above our central research question in this paper is *what are the practices of engagement by researchers and practitioners in engaged project studies and how can we theorize on this engagement?* These questions are answered by presenting three cases of engaged scholarship in project studies, which are analyzed in terms of research and practitioner goals, negotiation practices, reciprocity typology and research outcomes. Our findings show separate, instead of joint, relevance for theory and practice in the studied cases, causing negotiations over the reciprocal relationship between scholars and practitioners which in turn influence the project study's outcomes.

The paper contributes to the project studies debate with an improved concept of engaged scholarship, distinguishing three types of reciprocity; generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity. Furthermore, in contrast with the engaged scholarship literature which assumes reciprocal relations to be more or less stable (e.g. Martin, 2010; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006), we found that reciprocal relationships are not stable but change over time. Consequently, reciprocity does not always work as an equalizing force (Kadefors, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Newcombe, 1996). Instead reciprocal relations in engaged research can change over time to perpetuate or even increase existing inequalities between researcher and practitioner. Four mechanisms were identified that turn balanced into negative reciprocal relationships: over-engagement, consultancy-on-the-cheap, drifting apart, and politization.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, the concept of engaged scholarship is discussed, arguing that the concept lacks definitional clarity (Sandmann, 2008). We argue that a better understanding of reciprocity, which is central to engaged scholarship literature, will further our understanding of the reciprocal dimensions of engaged scholarship. In the method section we explain the selection of the three cases of engaged scholarship and the process of data analysis. We then present each of the three cases. Finally, in the discussion section the findings are analyzed in the context of project studies and engaged scholarship literature. We conclude by summarizing our main contributions, implications, limitations and suggestions for future research on engaged project studies.

2. Focusing on reciprocity

Despite the ambiguous relationship between academic research and engagement most scholars on engaged scholarship seem to agree that both standards of quality scholarship and tenets and values of engagement are central to the concept of engaged scholarship (Sandmann, 2008). The standards of quality scholarship may differ per discipline, or even per journal, but are already being discussed and refined through peer-review, method sections and methodological papers (Cuthill, 2010). Therefore, we consider the standards of quality scholarship to be relatively well established within engaged literature and infer that most discord stems from (implicit) assumptions about the nature of engagement. Engagement in this context is expressed through a reciprocal relationship that adds value to both the community and the scholar's discipline (Franz, 2009). Within project literature the concept of reciprocity has been used sparsely (cf. Kadefors, 2004; Newcombe, 1996). Kadefors (2004) adopts the concept of reciprocity in her analysis of trust in project relationships to explain how actions of distrust elicit self-serving behavior, while actions of trust elicit co-operative behavior. Newcombe (1996) conceptualizes reciprocity as an influence-strategy in the absence of formal authority (see also Lewis, 2006).

2.1. Reciprocity in engaged scholarship literature

Reciprocity has been more frequently used within the literature on engaged scholarship and (participatory) action research (Greenhalgh et al., 2016) in which reciprocity is defined as an ongoing process, or strategy, of mutual exchange maintaining equality between researcher and researched (Huisman, 2008; Maiter et al., 2008). Reciprocity is advocated as a strategy that helps to gain better data (Lather, 1986) to overcome of tensions between researcher and researched (Robertson, 2000) and to avoid negative stereotyping and lack of perspective on the real needs of a community (Maiter et al., 2008). Although reciprocity is treated as an equalizing force within both project studies (Kadefors, 2004; Newcombe, 1996) and engaged scholarship literature (Huisman, 2008; Maiter et al., 2008) scholars recognize that establishing reciprocity is challenging. Lather (1986) names five challenges that are of interest in the context of project studies; (1) communities are heterogenic and might be divided over topics of interest, (2) communities who have had prior negative experience with academic researchers might test researchers' credibility, (3) researchers are rarely in a position to affect policy or allocate resources, (4) researchers can impose their meaning rather than construction meaning in dialogue with research participants, and finally (5) false consciousness is when the participants' denial of how their common-sense ways of looking at the world is permeated with meanings that sustain their disempowerment. Engaged scholarship and (participative) action research literature is mainly concerned with overcoming these problems through reciprocity, proposing that engaged scholars should aim to establish 'full' or 'maximal' reciprocity (Lather, 1986; Robertson, 2000).

To establish maximal reciprocity Lather (1986) proposes conducting interviews in an interactive, dialogical, manner, sequential interviewing of both individuals and small groups to facilitate collaboration and a deeper probing of research issues, negotiating meaning of research findings, involving participants in a collaborative effort to build empirically rooted theory

Table 1
Types of reciprocity.

Type	Characteristics	Indicators
Generalized reciprocity	An exchange over an indefinite reimbursement period, with undefined equivalency of return and with a low self-interest.	A reciprocal relationship not dependent on the eventual return of resources, as it is sustained by prevailing social relations.
Balanced reciprocity	A simultaneous exchange of equivalent resources without any delay in which both parties mutually benefit	A reciprocal relationship dependent on the eventual return of resources.
Negative reciprocity	Timely, equivalent returns and high self-interest	A more or less one-sided flow of resources, contingent upon deceit or the failure to mobilize countervailing pressure.

and discussions of false consciousness. Also dissemination of knowledge to community members, media, politicians and policymakers (Maiter et al., 2008), making of appropriate referrals (Huisman, 2008), holding of public forums (Smith et al., 2010), and befriending the participants (Lather, 1986) help to establish reciprocity. However, as it turns out, more reciprocity is not always better. In her study Huisman (2008) felt the need to establish maximal reciprocity in order to prevent taking advantage of the engaged community and to prevent feelings of disappointment within the community after the research has ended. Tensions emerged within the reciprocal relationship as participants started to consider Huisman as a friend sometimes even calling her family, and thus started to share more personal and important information (as proposed by Lather, 1986). Aware that this information would be of benefit to her, Huisman now felt the need to reciprocate the engaged community even more. Here the use of reciprocity deepened the relationship with the community, which therefore deepened the need to reciprocate, etc. In this case the use of reciprocity contributed to the feelings of betrayal and exploitation that it was supposed to prevent, making it even more painful when the reciprocal ties were broken after the research had ended. This account of 'reciprocity gone wrong' teaches us that the use of reciprocity is not unproblematic.

2.2. Three dimensions of reciprocity

To obtain a deeper and more critical understanding of reciprocity we need to turn to well-established anthropological literature on this topic (Gouldner, 1960; Graeber, 2001; Lévi-Strauss, 1969). In recent decades, anthropological studies and concepts found their way to organization and management studies. Examples of these are the Geertz's (1973) interpretation of culture on which the debate on organization culture has been built upon and Turner's work on symbols (Turner, 1967) which has been picked up in organization studies and project studies (Van Marrewijk, 2017). In a final example the concepts of rituals, liminality and rite de passage developed by Van Gennep (1960) have found their way to contemporary project and organization studies.

One of the first to discuss reciprocity was anthropologist Malinowski (1922) who showed in his famous study of the Trobriand Islands that an important condition for reciprocal action is that it is not performed because it is dictated by formal rules or role expectancies, but as a repayment for benefits received. Gouldner (1960) theorised that reciprocity is a generalized moral norm:

> "There are certain duties that people owe one another, not as human beings, or as fellow members of a group, or even as occupants of social statuses within the group but, rather because of their prior actions. We owe others certain things because of what they have previously done for us, because of history of previous interaction we have had with them. It is this kind of obligation which is entailed by the generalised norm of reciprocity" (1960: 171–172).

Unlike formal rules or social roles, the norm of reciprocity does not prescribe specific and uniform performances, actions or gifts. Instead, the way in which the actors involved reciprocate may vary substantially from situation to situation (Gouldner, 1960). The act of giving back can therefore take many forms, both material and immaterial. The indeterminacy of the norm of reciprocity allows it to be applied to situation which are not governed by formal rules or role expectations.

Malinowski's and Gouldner's work was built upon by Sahlins (1973) who explicated three dimensions of reciprocity which are relevant to our discussion of engaged scholarship: (1) immediacy of returns, which refers to the timespan between initial offering of a good or service and its repayment, spanning from simultaneous to indefinite reciprocation; (2) equivalence of returns, which encompasses the extent to which resources exchanged are similar in value; and, (3) interest, which describes the nature of the exchange-partners' involvement in the exchange process. Interest ranges from unbridled self-interest, through mutual interest to altruistic interest and concern for the other. Different configurations of these dimensions yield three types of reciprocal exchange that will assist our analysis of researcher engagement in project studies. The three types are discussed below (for an overview of their characteristics see Table 1).

The first type is *generalized reciprocity*. It refers to putatively altruistic transactions, which is a weak reciprocity due to the vagueness of the obligation to reciprocate (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). Here an exchange is over an indefinite reimbursement period, with undefined equivalency of return and with a low self-interest. This is what Graeber (2001) calls 'open' reciprocity which is based upon permanent mutual commitment. This type is at hand for example with long-term career engagement of established scholars within project management studies. With generalized reciprocity the flow of resources is sustained by prevailing social relations not stipulated by quality, quantity or time (Sahlins, 1973). This is not to say that funds and access to projects generate no counter obligation, but the counter is not clearly defined (Sahlins,

Table 2
Characteristics of used concepts for the analytical framework.

Research goals	Negotiation practices	Reciprocity typology	Outcomes
Academical Researchers can hold different theoretical interests, and different ideas about how, and to what extent, they should reciprocate the engaged community *Practical* Practitioners can have divers (strategic) goals	Tensions between theoretical and practical relevance, and between expectation of both researcher and researched are negotiated in practice	A reciprocal relationship can be generalized, balanced or negative. Reciprocity is not stable and can change over time.	*Academical* Researchers may not be able to fulfill their goals due to the challenges of reciprocity *Practical* Practitioners may not be able to fulfill their goals due to the challenges of reciprocity

1973). These transactions are highly social as over time a relationship of trust is established between the researcher and the project community, in which altruistic transactions take place. A reciprocal relationship where failure to return does not cause the giver to stop giving, is an indicator of generalized reciprocity (Sahlins, 1973). We think here of reciprocity within a household or between long-time partners in an alliance (Pitsis et al., 2003).

The second type is *balanced or symmetrical reciprocity*, which is a simultaneous exchange of equivalent resources without any delay in which both parties mutually benefit. That is, recipients must reimburse their benefactors with something of roughly equivalent value within a finite timeframe. The adjective 'roughly' signals that more than one specific resource, or amount of recourses, is acceptable as a return. Expectations of rough equivalence helps sustain the reciprocal relation in two ways. First, it allows for easier compliance, since "the demand for exact equality would place an impossible burden even on actors highly motivated to comply with the reciprocity norm and would yield endemic tensions" (Gouldner, 1960: 172). Second, it "induces a certain amount of ambiguity as to whether indebtedness has been repaid and, over time, generates uncertainty about who is in whose debt" (Gouldner, 1960: 175). According to Sahlins (1973) a balanced reciprocity is indicated by a reciprocal relationship that is dependent on the eventual return of resources. In the workplace balanced reciprocity can serve to even out power differentials between staff positions, to create a more supportive work environment and to decrease the inherent uncertainties of work (Lewis, 2006). Conversely, Lévi-Strauss (1969) understood bilateral forms of reciprocity to be restricted forms of reciprocity. Even more critical is Graeber (2001) who states that when the relation is balanced and accounts are kept this should be called 'closed' reciprocity; competitive, individualistic and most like market exchange. Thought of in this way, we can see the relationship as a continuum from closed to open. We think in this type of reciprocity to exist within a consortium or a project team.

The third type is *negative reciprocity,* characterised by timely, equivalent returns and high self-interest. Actors in this form seek to maximise utility at the expense of others. This is the most impersonal form of exchange when a practitioner tries to postpone or even prevent the publishing of political sensitive findings or when researchers publish their findings without permission of the engaged community. Negative reciprocity occurs where reciprocity is promised, but not delivered.

In contrast to generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity is contingent upon deceit or the failure to mobilize countervailing pressure. One might imagine stakeholders who initiate research for the purpose of furthering their own (political) interests. Negative reciprocity cannot be found in traditional academic research practices as this type of research does not involve reciprocal relationships and does not expect repayment for benefits received. We think in this type of reciprocity of withdrawing access to a project.

In sum, reciprocity can be generalized, balanced or negative and is always negotiated in practice. When conceptualizing reciprocity we need to take full account of the negotiation practices and power issues of both researchers and practitioners influencing and changing reciprocal relationships between academics and practitioners in project communities. For an overview of the three discussed types of reciprocity see Table 1.

Based on this theoretical exploration, we propose four concepts that will assist our analysis of engaged scholarship. The first are the academic and practical goals which are, at the start of an engaged scholarship study, jointly discussed by both academics and practitioners. These goals are not necessarily equal, not even within the group of academics and the community of practitioners (Sandmann, 2008). Second are the negotiation practices as reciprocity is not stable but negotiated in practice (Lather, 1986). Third, is the above discussed reciprocity typology of general, balanced and negative reciprocity (Sahlins, 1973). And finally the engaged research outcomes, which, despite their best efforts, researchers or practitioners may not be able to fulfill due to the challenges and negotiation practices in the reciprocal relationships. This characteristics of the framework, which will be used to analyze the three cases, has been summarized in Table 2 below.

3. Methodology

To answer the two research questions we used the ethnographic research method (Fine et al., 2008). Ethnography is an excellent longitudinal method (Pettigrew, 1990) for studying practices of engaged scholarship and their development over time as this allows to include in-depth personal experiences with engagement (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Such a method describes, interprets, and explains

behaviour, meaning, and cultural products through direct data collected by researchers who are physically present in a project setting over a long period of time (Ybema et al., 2009). The first author has, together with others, executed twelve ethnographic studies that matched with our understanding of engaged scholarship as discussed earlier.

The selection of our cases is based upon the following criteria. First, out of the twelve cases we selected eight studies that could be labelled as project studies (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2018). One study, on solving disruptions on the railway network, was not a typical construction project but as it had a clear objective, scope and timeline with start and finish, we included the case. Finally, as an outcome of this process we selected three of the eight cases as the dynamic process of engaged scholarship was best observable in these cases; (1) high speed train construction project, (2) joint construction of utilities infrastructure improvement project, and (3) solving of disruptions in the railway network project. Data for these cases were collected in different periods; (1) between 2004 and 2006, (2) between 2013 and 2017, and (3) between 2014 and 2017. Although the selected cases are on construction and process improvement projects, we focus our study on all projects (being construction, change, or ICT) that select engaged scholarship as the dominant method.

To analyze the data of these cases, interpretative sensemaking was followed as a kind of 'dwelling in one's data' (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). This type of interpretative analysis is designed to strengthen claims made about actors' interpretations of events (Ybema et al., 2009). The first step of the interpretive method (Schwartzman, 1993) was the close reading of the data collected in the three cases. In the second step, the first author used the concepts of Table 2 to structure the cases. To prevent the risks of the first author's possible sympathetic interpretation of research findings (Vaara, 2003), the analysis of the cases in the third step was conducted by the second author, who was in no way involved in the case studies. Where uncertainties occurred the second author asked the first author to contextualize and elaborate on the cases in writing. Through this process of questioning, clarification, and contextualization the case descriptions were refined. These clarifications were incorporated in the final written cases. During this process the author continuously went back and forth between the cases and the concepts. At this point the first author also got involved in the analysis, questioning which data filled at which concepts. The fourth and final step was the building of theory, which involved a final interpretive process of multiple readings and iterations between tentative assertions and data.

4. Cases of engaged project studies

4.1. High speed train construction project

With a budget of 3.4 billion euro the high speed train project is one of the largest Dutch infrastructural projects, aimed to connect the Netherlands to the European high-speed railway network. The project management organization, supervised by the Directorate-General for Transport, Public Works and Water Management, initiated, managed and executed all activities related to the construction of the railway. The construction was executed through public-private partnership contracts. As this type of contract was rather new to the community of public project managers in 2003, the project director asked a research team, in which the first author participated, to co-create knowledge (Galvagno and Dalli, 2014) together with project employees, on the used management model for two year. The academic goal of the study was to challenge an economic-rational perspective on megaprojects with an in-depth understanding of daily life in complex megaprojects.

The research team was first headed by a university professor who, in his youth, had played hockey with the project director which created a warm personal relationship. The team acted as co-producers of new knowledge on managing megaprojects together with project employees in co-creation sessions and discussion sessions on research findings. The team was sensitive to not being 'used' as sources of political or societal legitimacy for the contested megaproject. The research had to make a difference to future processes rather than to legitimate existing or similar practices. To guarantee academic rigor the researchers got freedom to design the study according to the standards of scholarship. Also, the team insisted upon using researcher triangulation (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006) when interviewing, one taking notes, the other doing the interview. All interviews were transcribed directly after they had taken place. Data triangulation was applied in terms of the sources consulted including interviews, participant observations, websites, public reports, management reports, internal reports, and public hearings. The type of interviews conducted were biographical interviews (Ashokan, 2015), which take a longitudinal perspective on the career of project managers and employees.

Unfortunately, due to health problems, the professor had to stop his research work prematurely. The first author took over the professor's tasks and during a two-year's period supervised a team of four employees of the project's knowledge management department. This changed the relationship between the research team and the project director, which was observed in the negotiation of the right to publish findings in an academic journal. It was agreed upon that for the first three years after the termination of the study permission for publication should be discusses with the project director.

The outcome of the study received a mixed welcome by the project community. The project manager perceived the narrative writing style of the final report, with its many qualitative quotes, to be too sensitive for publication. It was given to the Minister of Infrastructure with the imprint "confidential" and thus became politicized. The researchers were forbidden to distribute the report, but were allowed to share the insights with the community of public project managers. The results of the study were disseminated to these managers through workshops and training as the first author acted as a teacher for a period of time. This stimulated the further development of the platform of knowledge creation (KING) and the Government Project Academy (RPA) as the

Table 3
Analysis of the 'high speed train construction project' case.

Research goals	Negotiation practices	Reciprocity typology	Outcomes
Academical		*From balanced to generalized reciprocity*	*Academical*
Understanding of daily life in complex mega projects	Securing academic rigor through independent research design, and researcher triangulation	Funding was to be returned by an evaluation report	Academic papers in IJPM and PMJ New research funding and access
Practical			*Practical*
Evaluation study of used management model	Academic papers were published anonymized	Project manager blocked publication of evaluation report	Evaluation report (confidential) Workshops
Empowering of project managers	Securing project goals through confidentiality of the final report and permission needed to publish findings	Project manager assists the start-up of a new study The project manager is gifted an academic book upon his retirement	Reflection sessions

community of public project managers realized that they needed extra competences to manage complex public-private partnerships.

After the replacement of the project director, the data set has been used anonymously, without prior permission, for two academic publications in project journals. Notwithstanding this action, the reciprocal relationship turned into long-term relationship as the former project director helped to start a new study on public-private collaboration. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2012 the former project director, the first author and his academic colleague and initiated a new collaboration to help managers of complex megaprojects with workshops and reflection sessions on collaboration. In return, the first author and academic colleagues rewarded him with an academic book at his retirement. Now the case has been described, we can analyze it by using the earlier discussed concepts (see Table 3).

4.2. Joint construction of utilities infrastructure improvement project

Utility networks such as water pipes, sewers, gas mains, electricity lines and telecommunication cables are crucial for the wellbeing of modern citizens and are in constant need for renewal, repair and maintenance. The study was initiated by the constructors to reduce costs and process time and to improve their (low) profits. Furthermore, better collaboration in the joint construction of utility networks was supposed to prevent disruptions and inconveniences for citizens. The Dutch Union of Contractors supported the study and introduced the first author in the research project, in exchange for an independent academic voice. The first author had a pre-existing relationship with the Union as one of its managers was his former student. The goal of the research, which took place between 2012 and 2017, was to improve the collaboration of nine Dutch utilities organizations (operators and constructors) in the joint construction of utility networks through pragmatic participatory action research (Swantz, 2008). This meant that the involved author had to empower the contractors so that they may act to achieve change (Swantz, 2008).

The academic goal of the study was to gain in-depth understanding of the change work in an inter-organizational setting by executing participant observation over a long period of time. Such participation elicits a strong, emotional response that has an impact on research work in which the researcher has to give up the status of the knowledgeable person (Ybema et al., 2009). Furthermore, such participation is time consuming, something that academics frequently lack. To make such a study possible the first author combined the roles of ethnographer and change consultant. He was hired for one day a week to help the involved partners to improve their mutual collaboration. The involved author negotiated with the utilities organizations over the combined role of ethnographer and change consultant. With a few exceptions (e.g. Van Marrewijk, 2018; Ruijter, 2019), a combined role as a researcher and consultant or employee is rarely mentioned in project literature. The first author moved back and forth between the academic role of ethnographer and the role of change consultant to ensure the collection of high-quality data and to help the community to improve their collaboration. Participant action research is criticized for not producing high quality ethnographic data (Swantz, 2008). Therefore, for safeguarding academic standards of scholarship and to prevent sympathetic interpretations (Vaara, 2003), the involved author negotiated the access of seven master students to collect field data. For academic standards a post doc researcher was needed to analyze the data, but the involved author had to fund this from other sources. Furthermore, funding of the study was a recurrent topic of negotiation as periods of no longer than six months funding were agreed upon between the utilities organisations. The researcher was highly dependent on the operators for funding and continuation of the project.

The study was successful in organizing frequent co-creation and reflection sessions with employees at the work floor, and thus creating a learning community. A management team, consisting of managers of the 9 involved utilities organizations, supervised the outcomes of this learning community. The community executed 500 pilots showing the reduction of costs, process time and increase of customer satisfaction. The study further returned the community with insights in their collaborative practices and change pitfalls. However, the supervision team didn't implement these innovations due to a temporal misfit (Dille and Söderlund, 2011) between the (public) operators and the contractors in their decision making processes. For the public utilities operators the changes needed to implement the new, cheaper processes were too demanding. The academic outcomes were two academic papers of which one has been published in a project management journal. The

Table 4
Analysis of the 'joint construction of utilities infrastructure improvement project' case.

Research goals	Negotiation practices	Reciprocity typology	Outcomes
Academical Understanding inter-organisational change dynamics *Practical* Improving the collaboration of 9 Dutch utilities organisations in joint construction of utility networks	Researcher secured academic goals through the role of ethnographer/ consultant, through field data collection by master students and a post doc researcher for data analysis Practical goals are secured through pilots, meetings of supervision team, and the strategic use of temporal misfit	*Researcher and operators: balanced reciprocity* The researcher was dependent on the operators for funding and continuation of the project *Researcher and contractors: from balanced to generalized reciprocity* Researcher is introduced to the project, in exchange for an independent academic voice The contractors assist the acquisition of funding for a new study	*Academical* Academic paper in PMJ New research opportunities *Practical* Creating of a learning community New joint construction process (not implemented)

relationship with the Union of Contractors continued and they helped to acquire funding from the Dutch Research Agency for a large study on joint construction of critical infrastructures. For a summary of the second case see Table 4.

4.3. Solving of disruptions in the railway network

The Netherlands has a very high density in railway networks, and quick responses to disruptions are needed to prevent serious delays or even traffic infarcts. This research was funded by both the Dutch research agency and the rail network operator to solve disruptions in the Dutch railway network, and was part of a larger research program. The goal of the research project, which lasted from 2013 to 2017, was the co-creation of knowledge (Galvagno and Dalli, 2014) on the solving of disruptions in the Dutch rail network together with experts of the network operator. The researchers received funding and got access to the field in exchange for active participation in the control rooms. The academic goal of the study was to understand the daily socio-material routines and collaborative practices in the railway control room when solving (small) disruptions. For this purpose the study was executed by a research consortium consisting of three universities and two PhD students. Under the supervision of the involved author one PhD student studied the construction of the control room as a project and observed employees routines in the railway control room. By engaging professionals in a dialogue, as suggested by Schön (1983), knowledge on disruption management could be developed.

Negotiations took place considering the content and time scale of the research team's contributions. PhD studies typically have a four years-time scale, while the rail network professionals expected short term answers to the practical challenge of solving disruptions. Therefore, the PhD student was present at the network operator for two days a week to guarantee the exchange of insights and ideas and to introduce new topics to the professionals. Negotiations were also needed to gain access to regional control rooms and to find professionals interested. For this purpose, the organization appointed a research coach to facilitate access and to strengthen the reciprocal relation of researcher and rail network community. Although there were three different research coaches over four years, this design worked well for getting access but not for the transfer of research findings and outcomes to the rail network community. According to the research coach, the frequent rotation of employees made it difficult to include new employees in the study and the slow rhythm of research process caused that the findings came too late for the organization. For example, a new control room had been designed and constructed without consulting the findings of the research team. Because of this, the researchers' interests drifted away towards topics such as the disruptions caused by railroad suicides. This topic had a low priority within the rail network community but was academically very interesting. This low priority combined with the high turnover at the regional control room, caused the study to lose relevance to the organization and the research consortium lost interest in knowledge transfer. At the same time the researchers had lost contact with the organization and turned their focus to the time consuming publishing of academic publications, including a PhD thesis.

The outcome of the study was deemed successful in terms of academic outcomes. At the end of the study a PhD thesis was successfully written which included four, partly published, academic papers of which one won a best paper award at a renowned conference. Furthermore, the collaboration between the scholars in this research was experienced as successful, resulting in the continuation in a new research project with a different community. In terms of practitioner outcomes the study was less successful as attempts to transfer our knowledge to the appropriated experts failed and the organization showed little interests in the outcomes. The presence of the PhD student in the control rooms and the feedback sessions during the field research period were probably the most valuable knowledge transfer periods. The third case has been presented in Table 5.

5. Discussion

The aim of this paper is to encourage project scholars to reflect upon their methodological practices when applying engaged scholarship in their studies. Analyzing the presented project cases brought three main insights to the light which are relevant to our discussion of engaged scholarship in project studies.

Table 5
Analysis of the 'solving of disruptions in the railway network' case.

Research goals	Negotiation practices	Reciprocity typology	Outcomes
Academical		*From balanced to negative reciprocity*	*Academical*
Understanding the daily socio-material routines and collaborative practices in the railway control room	Securing the exchange of insights and ideas through researcher presence at the field site	Researchers received funding and got access to the field in exchange for active participation in the control rooms	Academic papers PhD thesis Continued collaboration with academic research partners
Practical	The appointment of a research coach to facilitate access and strengthen the reciprocal relation	The appointment of research coaches worked well for getting access but not for the transfer of research findings	*Practical*
Creating new knowledge on solving disruptions in the Dutch rail network		Topic of research changes over time, creating a mismatch between the relevance of research topics for academy and practice., which caused the study to lose relevance to the community	None
		The community continued without taking the research findings into account and new professionals were not involved in the study, causing the research consortium to lose interest in knowledge transfer	

5.1. Accommodating fragmented academic and practitioners goals

The findings in the three cases show that accommodating academic and practitioner goals is central in engaged scholarship. In line with Martin (2010) we argue that quality scholarship and engagement of project practitioners can go hand in hand as in all three cases, academic goals were successfully secured through the use of rigorous research methods such as longitudinal fieldwork and researcher triangulation (Pettigrew, 1990). At the same time, in all three cases project practitioners were involved in the formulation of research questions and the development of new knowledge on inter-organizational collaboration. Engaged scholarship thus has the potential to empower practitioners, while conducting rigorous research, as promised by earlier studies (Cuthill, 2010; Martin, 2010; Peterson, 2009).

However, on a closer look, all cases show (large) differences in the goals of involved academics and practitioners. For example, in the 'high speed train' case the academic intention to gain in-depth understanding of the daily life in megaprojects is very different from the project manager's intention to evaluate the used management model. Moreover, and in line with Lather (1986), it is even difficulty to speak of a homogenous community of practitioners with coinciding interests. For example, in the 'utilities infrastructure' case the researcher had divers sets of reciprocal relations with diverting interests within a heterogeneous community of practitioners. This diversity hinders scholars in their aim to find research topics of interest to both academia and practice (Doberneck et al., 2010; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006).

5.2. Reciprocal relations change over time

The findings of the three cases show that the accommodation of academic and practitioner goals is accompanied by negotiations which are not limited to the preparation phase but continue during the execution of the engaged scholarship study. These negotiations can threaten the reciprocal relation when balanced reciprocity changes into negative. For example, despite initial efforts on both sides, scholars in the 'railway disruption' case were not able to contribute to the engaged community as a high turnover among community members and diverting interests hindered the transfer of knowledge. Thus, in contrast to literature on engaged scholarship assuming reciprocal relations to be more or less stable (Martin, 2010; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006), our cases show that these relations change over time.

We can now better understand why creating relevance for both theory and practice is difficult. Researchers sometimes concentrate on collecting data for their own interests while practitioners use research results for their own, political motivated, goals as was observed in the 'high speed train' case. Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) suggested to "systematically come up with alternative practical formulations of the research question" (p.815) to create relevance and to align reciprocal relations. However, our findings show that the researchers' interests can easily drift away towards topics with low priority within the engaged community, such as control room's spatial settings and disruptions caused by railroad suicides in the 'railway disruptions' case.

Finally, the findings show that the relationship between researchers and the engaged community has to be understood in the context of the project ecology (Grabher, 2004) as these relationships may predate a research and may last after its

ending. For example, in the 'high speed train' case the relationship between the project director and the former leader of the research team dated back for 30 years. All three cases show that data sets are (re)used after the contract's end and in all but one case reciprocal relationships developed into generalized reciprocity. Consequently, not only project managers, consultant and experts but scholars too are part of the more permanent ecologies of projects (Grabher, 2004). Being part of the project ecology emphasizes the need for scholars to be reflective on their embeddedness if they aim to (co)produce relevant and academically sound knowledge through engaged scholarship.

5.3. Threatening mechanisms

We have found four mechanisms that threaten either the academic and/or practitioner outcomes of the engaged scholarship project study. First, academic outcomes are threatened by *over-engagement* of researchers with the engaged community, potentially resulting in sympathetic interpretations (Vaara, 2003) or lack of critical distance (Ybema et al., 2009). This was for example the case in the 'utilities infrastructure' case where the researcher's sympathy with those actors willing to change hindered critical distance. Second, academic outcomes came under threat because of practitioners' distinct rhythm. Practitioners need short-term solutions, leaving little room for rigorous academic methods and long-term analysis, which could have resulted in '*consultancy on the cheap*' (Söderlund and Maylor, 2012). Third, reciprocal outcomes were threatened by the *drifting apart* of researchers and engaged project community posing a serious challenge to the impact of engaged scholarship studies. This was caused by loosing of interests (disruption on railway case), changing of topics (high speed train case), rotation of practitioners (disruptions on railway case) or not using research results (joint construction case). Fourth and last, the *politicization* of research outcomes, bringing forward the significance of the term 'roughly equivalent return' (Gouldner, 1960). The 'high speed train' case shows how the value of an evaluation report can change when it is deemed too sensitive for publication. Here the way in which the engaged community is "repaid" changed from publishing evaluation results to *not* publishing evaluation results. These four mechanism emphasize that we should not treat reciprocity as a one-dimensional concept which works as an equalizing force (Kadefors, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Newcombe, 1996), but acknowledge that reciprocal relations in engaged scholarship studies can change over time to perpetuate or increase existing inequalities.

How can engaged project scholars keep themselves from engaging in a negative reciprocal relation? Fortunately, both the balanced and negative types of reciprocity allow for negotiation, as reciprocity between researcher and subject is negotiated in practice (Zigo, 2001). Negotiating reciprocal exchange is a skillful game consisting of a "complex totality of conscious and unconscious maneuvers in order to gain security" (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 54). For example, one can give generously in order to obtain strategically as power and status are directly linked to reciprocal relations (Malinowski, 1922). When project scholars and practitioners engage in a negative reciprocal relationship they risk to widen, instead of closing, the gap between academia and practice. This risk is neither acknowledged in project literature (e.g. Kadefors, 2004; Newcombe, 1996) nor in engaged scholarship literature (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Sandmann, 2008) as in both literatures a balanced reciprocity is presumed (cf. Huisman, 2008).

6. Conclusions

In this study on engaged scholarship in project studies we focused on the research question *what the practices of engagement by researchers and practitioners are in engaged project studies and how can we theorize on this engagement?* Reflexivity on practices of engagement is needed, we argue, because limited understanding of the influence of engaged scholarship on the process and outcomes of project studies hampers both the development of the project studies debate (Geraldi and Söderlund, 2016) and the development of the undertheorized concept of engaged scholarship (Sandmann, 2008). To explicate implicit assumptions about the nature of reciprocal relationships we turned to anthropological literature (e.g. Gouldner, 1960; Graeber, 2001; Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Malinowski, 1922) and found generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity (Sahlins, 1973). Based upon this theoretical exploration we construed an analytical framework containing four elements; research and practitioner goals, negotiation practices, reciprocity typology and research outcomes. We used this framework to analyze three cases of engaged project studies and showed, in contrast to earlier studies (e.g. Martin, 2010; McKelvey, 2006), that although rigorous scholarship and practical relevance can be reconciled, both are not guaranteed when engaged scholarship is agreed upon. Academic and practitioner goals are threatened by fragmentation, changes in reciprocal relations over time and by four mechanism through which a balanced reciprocal relationship turns negative; over-engagement, consultancy on the cheap, drifting apart and politicization.

The findings in this paper contribute to the debate in project studies asking for "good, solid, critical research" (Söderlund and Maylor, 2012: 691) by theoretically develop the concept of engaged scholarship. Academics and practitioners can have generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity with different stakeholders, and these stakeholders in turn can hold diverting interests as well. In contrast to the engaged scholarship literature assuming reciprocal relations to be more or less stable (e.g. Martin, 2010; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006), we found that reciprocal relationships are not stable but negotiated in practice and change over time. These findings are in line with earlier studies (Zigo, 2001). However we added four identified mechanism that turn balanced into negative reciprocal relationships; over-engagement, consultancy-on-the-cheap, drifting apart, and politization. Consequently, reciprocity does not always work as an equalizing force (Kadefors, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Newcombe, 1996), but can increase existing inequalities between researchers and practitioners (Huisman, 2008). With these insights and the help of the framework project scholars

and practitioners can thus reflect upon practices of engaged scholarship in project studies.

The limits of this study are in the underrepresentation of practitioners in the three cases and in the selection of the cases. We recognize the difficulties of building theory from a small number of case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006), especially when they are based upon the experience of a single researcher. We cannot expect them to be exhaustive and more cases are needed to know if the mechanisms we found are ubiquitous. However, with Flyvbjerg (2006), we do contend that a case study approach is suitable for generalization when using the method of falsification. Flyvbjerg (2006) draws on Popper (2005) to argue that "[i]f just one observation does not fit with the proposition, it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected" (2005: p. 288). Therefore, our findings hold as far as they challenge existing assumptions about engaged scholarship and the influence of engagement on the quality of research. Although we think these findings are applicable for the broad field of engaged scholarship studies, we have particularly focused our message for project scholars.

Future research should aim to uncover additional mechanisms, and measures that counteract these, that threaten balanced reciprocity. Further areas of interest are the perspectives of practitioners, the mechanisms that turn balanced into generalized reciprocity, or negative in balanced reciprocity. Also of interest are the co-existence of multiple types of reciprocal relations between academics and practitioners and the analysis of the multifaceted nature of these relations.

In conclusion, we encourage engaged researchers to be reflexive of their engagement in their methodology sections, and hope this paper will provide leads. We encourage practitioners to support engaged scholarship by installing a research coach, opening up doors to the researchers, including research results in their decision making processes and organizing feedback sessions to the broader organization. We propose to accommodate the academic and practitioner goals in such a way that these are acceptable to both. Finally, we call to editors and reviewers of project management journals to be open to studies by engaged scholars.

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